

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD NEAR PARIS, TENN.,
ON JUNE 6, 1925.

September 25, 1925.

To the Commission:

On June 6, 1925, there a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad near Paris, Tenn., which resulted in the death of five employees and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Memphis district of the Memphis Division, a single-track line extending between Paris and Memphis, Tenn., a distance of 130 miles, over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders; no block-signal system is in use, but the rules require following movements to be spaced 10 minutes apart at open offices. The accident occurred at a point about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Paris; approaching this point from the north there are 2,058 feet of tangent, followed by a compound curve to the left 7,053 feet in length, which varies in curvature from $0^{\circ} 30'$ to $1^{\circ} 30'$, the accident occurring on this curve 2,551 feet from its northern end, where the curvature is at its maximum. Approaching from the south there are 983 feet of tangent, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The point of accident was on level track at the bottom of two descending grades, the grade from the north for a distance of more than 1 mile is from 1.00 to 1.25 per cent descending, while the grade from the south is 0.88 per cent descending for more than 1 mile and is then level to the point of accident, 1,050 feet distant. Trees bordering the right-of-way restrict the range of vision of enginemen across the inside of the curve to a distance of about 1,000 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 7.58 a.m.

Description

Southbound second-class local freight train No. 125 consisted of eight cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1124, and was in charge of Conductor Moore and Engineman Baldwin.

Before departing from Paris on the morning of the accident they received train order No. 31, Form 31, reading as follows

"No. 125 Eng 1124 meet First No 122 and
No. 114 Engs 973 and 1075 at Paris"

Train No. 125 departed from Paris at 7.50 a.m., five minutes late on its scheduled departing time, and at 7.58 a.m. collided with train first No. 122 at a point about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Paris while travelling at a speed estimated to have been about 25 miles an hour.

Northbound second-class freight train first No. 122 consisted of 23 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 973, and was in charge of Conductor McAlister and Engineman Shafer. At McKenzie, 14.6 miles from Paris, the crew received a copy of train order No. 31, Form 19, previously quoted. The train departed from McKenzie at 7.21 a.m. and collided with train No. 125 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 25 miles an hour.

Both engines were overturned on the inside of the curve, clear of the roadway; the first six cars in train No. 125 and the first eight cars in train first No. 122 were derailed and more or less badly damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman of train No. 125 and two track laborers riding on that train, and the engineman of train first No. 122.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Moore, of train No. 125, stated that he and Engineman Baldwin signed for and read train order No. 31 in the presence of each other and the operator; they then checked and signed the train register, and the conductor registered his train out upon the arrival of trains first No. 122 and No. 116. They then returned to their train, and upon arriving at the caboose Conductor Moore directed the flagman to release a brake which was sticking on the third car ahead of the caboose and then began to change his clothing, being so engaged as the train was leaving the yard, at 7.50 a.m. Conductor Moore admitted forgetting the meet with trains first No. 122 and No. 114, even after discussing it with Enginemen Baldwin and commenting on the fact that train first No. 122 was four hours late. Conductor Moore was unable to explain why he registered his train as departing from Paris after the arrival of trains first No. 122 and No. 116, instead of trains first No. 122 and No. 114, the last-mentioned trains being those named in the meet order; as a matter of fact train No. 116 is not due at Paris until 10.15 a.m., whereas the trains named in the meet order were already overdue. While the rules require that conductors see that

their flagmen read and understand all train orders received, Conductor Moore said he did not literally comply with this rule in this instance, as it was his custom to lay the orders received on a seat in the caboose where the flagmen and brakemen could read them as soon as their other duties permitted, he believed that had the order been read to him by the flagman or the middle brakeman, both of whom were in the caboose when he arrived there, his attention undoubtedly would have been attracted to the unfulfilled meet with the opposing trains and the accident would not have occurred.

Flagman Milan said he looked for the train orders on his return to the caboose after releasing the brake, but did not see them in the place where the conductor usually left them, and as the conductor was still busy changing his clothing he decided he could wait and ask to see the orders before the train reached Routon, the first station south of Paris. Flagman Milan thought the brakes were applied before the collision occurred, reducing the speed from about 25 miles an hour to 18 or 20 miles an hour at the time of the impact.

Middle Brakeman Dungan was engaged in separating way-bills and other clerical duties when Conductor Moore came into the caboose, and was still so engaged when the train left Paris and at the time the brakes were applied immediately before the collision occurred. He was of the opinion that the time interval between the brake application and the impact was of such short duration that the speed of his train was not materially reduced.

Head Brakeman Pitt said he and Fireman Eason coupled the engine to the train, and after releasing several hand brakes he returned to the engine. He was riding on the fireman's seat box looking ahead as his train approached the point of accident and saw the opposing train about the time it was 20 or 25 car-lengths distant, he called a warning to the engine crew, got down on the gangway steps, called to Fireman Eason again, and then jumped. Brakeman Pitt said he did not see the orders received at Paris, nor were they mentioned by any one, and that he always read the orders received but was unable to account for the fact that in this instance he had failed to do so.

Operator Leake, on duty at Paris on the morning of the accident, said he received train order No. 31 and delivered it to Conductor Moore and Engineman Baldwin, both of whom read the order aloud in his presence. He also said that both conductor and engineman appeared to be normal in every respect.

Fireman Marcus, of train first No. 122, said he was

working on the fire when his train approached the point of accident and his first knowledge of anything wrong was when Engineman Shafter, in getting off his seat box, fell backwards on the deck of the engine. Fireman Marcus said he rushed to the gangway, saw the opposing train about five car-lengths distant, and jumped just before the collision occurred. Fireman Marcus did not think the brakes were applied prior to the collision and estimated the speed of his train at the time to have been about 25 or 30 miles an hour.

The statements of Conductor McAlister, Flagman Stegall, and Head Brakeman Satterwhite, of train first No. 122, all of whom were in the caboose at the time of the accident brought out no additional facts of importance.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order, for which conductor Moore and Engineman Baldwin, of train No. 125, are responsible.

Conductor Moore acknowledged that he forgot the meet provided for in train order No. 31; Engineman Baldwin was killed in the collision and it is not known why he overlooked the order.

From the statements of Head Brakeman Pitt it appeared that the engineman did not show the order to the fireman or to any one else on the engine or acquaint them with its provisions, while from the testimony of Conductor Moore it is apparent that he did not in this instance and does not ordinarily show train orders to other members of the train crew, but leaves them where they may be read if desired; in the present case it is a question whether even this had been done. It is very probable that the accident would not have occurred had these employees shown the orders to the other members of their crew, or had the others made any inquiry concerning orders received. The fact that the flagman, middle brake-man, and head brakeman, and presumably the fireman, made no effort to see the order or ascertain its contents before their train departed from Paris, indicates an attitude of indifference which should not be tolerated; they should have been governed by that part of rule 210 which reads as follows:

"Should the conductor fail to show the orders to the flagman, or the engineman fail to show or read the orders to the fireman, the flagman or the fireman must ask for the orders."

Had an adequate block-signal system been in use on this

line this accident probably would not have occurred; an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

All of the employees involved were experienced men; at the time of the accident the train and engine crew of train first No. 122 had been on duty 11 hours and 45 minutes and the crew of train No. 125 about 30 minutes, previous to which they had all been off duty 11 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W.P. Forland,
Director.